

# The John Carroll Review

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Volume 71 | Issue 1

Article 20

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April 2017

## The First Time I Saw Prostitutes

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### Recommended Citation

Rizkala, Rita (2017) "The First Time I Saw Prostitutes," *The John Carroll Review*: Vol. 71 : Iss. 1 , Article 20.  
Available at: <http://collected.jcu.edu/jcr/vol71/iss1/20>

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## THE FIRST TIME I SAW PROSTITUTES

*Rita Rizkala*

I was about sixteen years old,  
When my mother spotted them  
And whispered in my ear,  
“*Haram*, those poor girls...”

There were three of them,  
As young as the jasmine  
Blooming in my *jido's* garden,  
But the white petals stripped  
From their fair buds.  
Their skin was pale yellow,  
Eyes drooped and bruised,  
Probably from the drugs.  
They followed a man,  
Tall, dark and burly,  
Disguised as the “father”  
Yet pacing ten steps ahead.

The pack stumbled and weaved  
Through the crowded *souk*,  
Blending in like a red crayon  
Lost in a sea of black ones.  
They crossed the busy street  
Into the isolated alley,  
And climbed up the stairs  
To the abandoned warehouse  
Right above the ice cream parlor,  
Where children licked their cones  
And danced with chocolate mustaches,  
Never to be seen again.

haram = “What a shame” in Arabic  
jido = “grandfather” in Arabic  
souk = marketplace